



It's you – you're shaping the future

With more kids than ever glued to a computer screen, time spent outside is becoming increasingly rare. Youth today are at risk of failing to develop an appreciation for the outdoors, a connection with nature, and a strong sense of place. But, that's where you come in.

This summer, your support helped provide programs such as Unplug, the Explorer Series, community hikes, and volunteer days for the youth of Sheridan County. Not to mention, your support helped build and maintain community trails – which play a huge role in getting kids outside and active.

At Unplug's Picnic on the Pathway event in July, families were invited to walk, bike, or scoot to Washington Park for a free dinner. (Thanks, Jimmy Johns!) The first family arrived with big smiles, explaining that this was their first time on the bike paths. The three boys and their father are from here; they live just up Highland hill and were outside being active together thanks to this event – and your vision that made it possible.



Kids of all ages hold stoneflies on the banks of Tongue River during an Unplug event last fall.

photo by Jill Langer, cover by MYBonnie Studios

As a land trust and as a community, we realize that the future of Sheridan County rests on our youth. The children of today will protect and care for our land tomorrow. Soon, they will become leaders of and voters in our community and the advocates for our special places. Thanks to your vision, we can raise them well.



photo by Tim Doolin Photography

Giving back to the land

When John and Vanessa Buyok look out the window of their ranch home along the Tongue River, they have reason to smile. Sometimes, it's because they've watched an owl land softly in a nearby cottonwood tree; other times, it's because a crop of hay made it in before the rain. But often, it's because they know that their ranch – and the valuable wildlife habitat within it – is richer and more vibrant, thanks to their foresight.

The Buyok family has ranched this land for nearly a hundred years. South Dry Creek, which meanders through the property, has provided seasonal water for their livestock, as well as habitat for deer, antelope, frogs and countless bird species.

For John and Vanessa, preserving the wildlife habitat on their land is a top priority, so in 2010 they protected 844 acres with a conservation agreement with Sheridan Community Land Trust.

But they didn't stop there. In 2015, as part of a project under the Tongue River Initiative, the Buyoks received fencing around delicate habitat along South Dry Creek. Fencing lets the Buyoks give native grasses and shrubs a rest from continual livestock grazing and a chance to regenerate. The soil becomes healthier and moister, the grasses suppler, and erosion caused by seasonal run-off is greatly reduced. The stream also flows for longer each year. And the effects are visible.

On our annual conservation visit this June, the ranch looked amazing. The vegetation was bouncing back from initial disturbance by the

fencing project, and as John explained, was lusher than ever. The pristine snowberries stood out against the healthy green backdrop, young willows lined the stream, and decade-old cottonwoods leafed out robustly.

John also reported that ranch life continued as usual. Even after fencing the cattle from fragile ecosystems for part of the year and changing the seasonal grazing schedule, John's ranching operation hadn't skipped a beat. "The grazing needed a little adjustment but worked out just fine." John said, "And, the bird life has flourished."

While the wildlife and scenery on Buyok's ranch can easily steal the show, the economic value of choosing to protect areas near the water is well worth a mention. Increased diversity of birds and mammals; healthier and more fertile soil; flexible grazing in renewed pastures off the water; and cleaner, cooler waters are among the many benefits of riparian fencing that enhance the land's present value, and the value in the future. For the Buyoks, their ranch in Sheridan County remains the best place to call home.



photo by Troy Tobiasson



photo by MYBonnie Studios

“Going up to Red Grade Trail and helping build it made me appreciate nature more. I have been able to get my family to hike with me up the trails and see some of the stuff we have done. I love going up to see the progress of the trees I planted and see how some of the other things we did are doing. I plan to volunteer to help this place expand and grow so others can enjoy Red Grade just as I have.”

– Jade, sophomore at Ft. McKenzie



Same dirt road, new destination

For many who grew up here, an evening at Red Grade meant one thing: a party. While the nature just off the road is some of the most treasured in the region, few noticed as they sped by, leaving evidence of their evening in pull-offs along the way. It was hard to imagine that Red Grade could ever become a wholesome destination...until now.

Things are changing for the better. For the high school students at Fort McKenzie this summer, Red Grade was a destination for something entirely different: volunteering on the trails. In just one day this June, thirty-five student and faculty volunteers built a section of trail, armored a lower gully with rocks, cleared branches for picnic areas, pulled weeds, planted several dozen trees, and even found the time to tell some jokes.

They set a high bar for a summer of hard work.

“I go up there right next to the trails in the amazing scenery. I sit on the edge where all the trees and flowers we had planted are at.

It is the most relaxing alone time at the trails. I sit down and look down at our beautiful little town. The trees and rivers are just amazing to look at. I never did this until we went up and helped with this project. I never thought to. It’s a very good coping skill for me.”

– Haley, sophomore at Ft. McKenzie

It started immediately. This time last year, as our staff and volunteers broke ground on new trail and crews finished reconstruction of the parking lots, you could already feel the difference from a year before on Red Grade road and the surrounding area. Trash disappeared from parking lots and ditches. Idling vehicles no longer had plumes of smoke coming from cracked windows – instead, they were filled with parents scrambling to find sunscreen and hats for their kids. And, take it or leave it, but the port-a-john is rumored to be the cleanest in the county.

With the community taking pride in the trails, Red Grade is no longer a sketchy destination – it’s a community-owned trail system, a part of each of us, and a part of our volunteers. To the students of Fort McKenzie, we want to say “thank you”. It’s because of these kids, and people like you, that conservation comes to life here in our community.

Over half of these students are volunteering at the Biketoberfest fundraiser this year. After all, since this place is part of who these kids are and who they will become, they love to share what makes it special.



photo by Tim Doolin Photography

One trail, for us all

Have you had your weekly dose of panoramic mountain views? If so, tip your hat to Don Roberts Jr., Tom Belus, Jane Clark, and Dixie See for making Soldier Ridge Trail – and those unobstructed views – possible.

It is private land, after all, yet thanks to these folks’ generosity and a belief in community-centered conservation, over 900 of your friends, neighbors, and houseguests benefited from being able to use this trail over the summer – experiencing solitude just minutes from downtown. Soldier Ridge Trail has been an asset to the community for the past six years.

What’s more, the trail is maintained by Sheridan Community Land Trust volunteers who love it the most. Thanks to their hard work, the trail is now complete with a boardwalk across the drainage (to keep shoes dry and protect the habitat), bike rollover gates, and a bench at mile four to soak up the views.

And, yes, we mow it...with the help of many of you. Our trail volunteers are often avid hikers or bikers who help us carry out a bucket or two of gravel to lay down on a muddy day. Other times, they are the eyes, ears, and friendly faces who frequent the trail.

If you’d like to play a part in caring for this special community resource, give us a call or email us at trails@sheridanclt.org. Thanks, and happy trails!



One of our volunteer superheroes, Bob Ahrens, walks his mower down Soldier Ridge Trail. You’ll be hard-pressed to beat those views. Plus, a mower is on the wish-list for Sheridan Community Land Trust!

Is conservation right for you?

Would you like to protect your land? Do you know someone who might be interested in protecting their ranch or land that's been in the family for generations? Would you like to ensure healthy wildlife habitat on your property or see the native grasses and trees renewed? People protect their land for a variety of reasons. Many times, it's a way to ensure that their love of the land will remain after they leave.

For others, it's a way to honor their parents and grandparents. Sometimes it helps with estate planning or financial management plans.

If you would like to explore whether a conservation easement is right for you and your family, feel free to give Brad Bauer a call at 307-673-4702. All conversations are confidential to provide your family the privacy it needs to make a decision that is right for you.



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Sheridan Community Land Trust works to preserve our heritage of open spaces, healthy rivers and creeks, working ranches, wildlife habitat and vibrant history, while expanding non-motorized recreation opportunities to connect people with the places they love.

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Get to know your water trail You're invited...



photo by Tim Doolin Photography

Bring your friends and family, and pedal your bikes to Kendrick Park for a **free autumn bicycle tour of the best spots in town to start a float trip**. Using the bike paths, we'll ride together along Goose Creeks. You'll have a chance to get familiar with the Tongue River Water Trail signs, ask questions, and **dream up your next float trip!**

WHEN: Wednesday, October 25th @ 4:30pm

WHERE: Meet at Kendrick Park

Please RSVP to Katie at 673-4702 or katie@sheridanclt.org.